



June 23, 2020

Sherrie Pugh, Chair
Governor’s Council for an Age-Friendly Minnesota
60spugh@gmail.com

Chair Pugh,

Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging (MNLCOA) is pleased to write today with our full support for the nine draft recommendations currently under discussion by the Governor’s Council for an Age-Friendly Minnesota. By advancing these efforts, we believe you can help ensure that we continue to thrive into the future as our state becomes older and more diverse.

Based on discussions by the MNLCOA Age-Friendly Minnesota Committee and a survey of our 34 member organizations that closed June 1, 2020, we share a high level of general support for all nine recommendations with no major outliers.

Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging is a champion, thought leader, planner, and educator that advances positive system change for older adults, their families and caregivers. The organization is focused on creating communities and systems that support aging with dignity and a spirit of well-being in Minnesota.

Council Member Prioritization of Recommendations:



The highest priority recommendations we encourage you to advance are 4, 2, and 9.

While the lowest ranked priorities were 7, 6 and 8, there is no concern in advancing them.

1265 Grey Fox Road
Suite 2
Arden Hills, MN 55112

(651) 271-3116
www.mnlcoa.org
adam@mnlcoa.org

The subsequent pages explore additional feedback from each recommendation, including direct quotes from MNLCOA members.

“The framework itself is focused on investment, sustainability and implementation, and our research bears that out.”

“This must be a priority at the outset of any work. It cannot be an afterthought or last on the list.”

“Resources need to be connected to outcomes or the whole concept risks becoming marginalized.”

“Infrastructure should be built in a manner that all future governors, regardless of political party, support and sustain it.”

Recommendation 1 – Support efforts for the State of Minnesota to enroll in the WHO/AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities

As a first course of action for our state, MNLCOA strongly supports this essential action step. Purposeful involvement of older adults, their families, and the aging services workforce in systems design, programs and policies is critical toward building more age friendly communities. Enrollment in the WHO/AARP Network provides a proven platform by which we can move forward.

Recommendation 2 – Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion in all Age-Friendly Work

While our discussions and survey responses primarily occurred prior to the killing of George Floyd and subsequent civil unrest, this recommendation was already a top priority for MNLCOA members. Aided by the discussions from the Minnesota Diverse Elders Coalition and our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee – both of which stand ready to work on these issues – this recommendation ensures communities across our state are engaged and recognizes that these communities are uniquely positioned to be their own best problem-solvers and innovators.

Recommendation 3 – Provide resources and support to local communities to adopt Age-Friendly policies, plans and practices

We know that to advance meaningful Age-Friendly Minnesota approaches requires investment. Establishing resources, such as grants for communities at the local level, has been proven to be an essential catalyst. Appreciating that even small local grants can do great things to replicate the local success stories we’ve seen to date, we must ensure rural communities and communities of color are able to access these funds. Our colleagues at the Minnesota Diverse Elders Coalition have insight to ensure these funds are nimble and get into the hands of the communities and partners that need them most.

Recommendation 4 – Create a sustainable, ongoing infrastructure within the administration to support Age-Friendly Minnesota work

The home for Age-Friendly Minnesota efforts going forward matters. Recognizing that your Council does not plan to identify a specific host of this work long-term, we offer the following criteria to accompany the recommendation to ensure that a host selection process results in a sustainable and successful choice. These include:

- Autonomy and independence to make and act on decisions;
- Standing as a reputable and respected leadership entity, with the clout capable of influencing policy across all state agencies;
- Administrative processes that can be nimble, streamlined and innovative to inspire, rather than deflect, broad participation and access;
- An expansive and passionate view of aging issues across the spectrum;
- Ability to engage easily as an inclusive and collaborative entity; and
- Effective use of evidence/data to understand and inform decision-making.

“This will be important for keeping the scope broad and not focusing solely on health and services.”

“Even more helpful might be individualized advising that could direct to targeted information.”

“Great idea. Ageism is apparent in our response to COVID-19.”

“Broadband should be a universally available public utility.”

“To be successful, we need a dedicated funding source and mechanism to interest with the legislature.”

Recommendation 5 – Support the development of a framework/analytical tool that will assist State agencies in analyzing their existing policies and programs, including a first step of evaluating their programs and policies to be Age-Friendly

It is worth noting that we have seen uneven engagement by the nine state agencies that are part of the Governor’s Age Friendly Council, but for the vision of an Age-Friendly Minnesota to thrive, all must be fully engaged. Exploration of other wide-ranging efforts that we can build upon is key. This framework/tool is also an important opportunity to ensure that ageism, diversity, equity and inclusion lenses are applied to this work.

Recommendation 6 – Establish an inventory of sources of information to inform the Age-Friendly Minnesota process post-enrollment

While this was one of the lower-ranked recommendations, it could represent essential work. Building on the best information available from elsewhere, including gaps analysis and the Minnesota Board on Aging’s 2030 Plan, it is important to see what is working and what isn’t in an effort to make continuous quality improvement and to ensure a diversity of information of resources are available.

Recommendation 7 – Include emergency preparedness as a unique domain in Age-Friendly Minnesota’s ongoing work

The lowest ranked of our priorities, MNLCOA members still recognize that in the face of the current pandemic, discrimination against older adults is occurring in testing, treatment, services, and research. Age-Friendly work could be connected with the larger emergency preparedness structure, which is being strengthened and fortified to manage public health emergencies. Minnesota must recognize the need to prepare for any emergency and ensure the needs of older adults are protected.

Recommendation 8 – Formulate plan to fill in gaps in service, including access to broadband and phone

Ensuring access to communication technology will be a great equalizer for older adults across our state, helping with equity challenges and reflecting a safe and cost-effective way to deliver healthcare and other supports and engagement options to older adults. MNLCOA members regularly report challenges related to the “digital divide” as very real in advancing their missions.

Recommendation 9 – The Minnesota Legislature is instrumental in ensuring Age-Friendly policies and resources are supportive and available to communities across Minnesota. Develop a plan to interact with the legislature and relevant committees

One of our highest priorities, we view this connection as essential. The ability to intersect with key committees beyond those designated for aging is needed to elevate aging as a greater priority for the state.

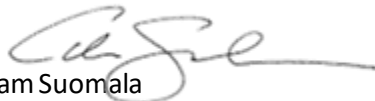
Additional Comments

Through our recent survey, MNLCOA members shared some additional thoughts for your Council to consider as you advance your work and recommendations:

- Consider the development, timing, and execution of a compelling communications plan to raise visibility of Age-Friendly communities as a social good – if other issues are taking up all the oxygen from the room it won't get a good kick-off.
- Address the issue of serious illness and end-of-life, given mortality is something we all share. 80% of older adults have at least one chronic condition and most have multiple, so managing serious illness, particularly in the community.
- Explore marketing or media campaign efforts to focus on ageism and the political will needed to make changes – you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. Unless we develop some thirst for these issues, many of the recommendations may fail to connect to the needed social change.
- The AARP survey only allows you to complete it if you're over 45. Recognize that policies and programs that work for Baby Boomers will not necessarily work for younger generations as economic realities are vastly different.
- Funding for older adult services need to be a higher priority in the state.
- Acknowledge the workforce crisis underway in older adult services and the crisis faced by family caregivers – particularly during COVID-19.
- Consider exploring direct ties to other organizations, including Chambers of Commerce, foundations, non-profits that support people of all ages like ARC-MN or childcare groups, and service organizations such as Rotary, Lions, etc.
- Explore ways to create visibility, relevancy, and a responsiveness to today's environment – recognizing that the pandemic and civil unrest are consuming public attention and the world is fundamentally changing.

On behalf of Minnesota's leading aging organizations, we thank you for your leadership and commitment to ensuring older Minnesotans have access to the needed supports to live well and age well.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at adam@mnlcoa.org or (651) 271-3116 for further clarification or to answer any questions.



Adam Suomala
Executive Director
Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging

Will Phillips
Executive Director
AARP Minnesota

Mollie O'Brien
Chief Strategy Officer
Alzheimer's Association Minnesota-North Dakota

Nona Ferguson
Vice President, Economic Stability and Aging
Services
Amherst H. Wilder Foundation

Patti Cullen
President and CEO
Care Providers of Minnesota

Patricia McArdle
Director of Aging and Disability Services
Catholic Charities

Roxana Linares
Executive Director
Centro Tyrone Guzman

Ann Bailey
President and CEO
DARTS

Kristine Martin
President and CEO
East Side Neighborhood Services

Beth Wiggins
Director of Caregiving and Aging Services
FamilyMeans

Jonathan Palmer
Executive Director
Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Inc.
Chris Kellogg
Director of Aging Services
Jewish Family Service of St. Paul

Phil Duran
Director of Advocacy and Research
JustUs Health

Mary McKeown
President and CEO
Keystone Community Services

Sunny Chanthanouvong
Executive Director
Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota

Gayle Kvenvold
President and CEO
LeadingAge Minnesota

James Falvey
Executive Director
Little Brothers – Friends of the Elderly

Mary Quirk
Executive Director
Living at Home Network

Patrick Thueson
Chief Executive Officer
Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota

Patrick Rowan
Executive Director
Metro Meals on Wheels

Jarrold Peterson
Public Policy Committee Chair
Minneapolis Area Senior Workers Association

Dawn Simonson
Executive Director, MAAA
Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Terri McCarthy
Geriatrician
Minnesota Association of Geriatrics Inspired
Clinicians

Loudi Rivamonte
President
Minnesota Association of Senior Services

Amanda Vickstrom
Executive Director
Minnesota Elder Justice Center

Tom Hyder
Executive Director
Minnesota Gerontological Society

Kathy Messerli
Executive Director
Minnesota HomeCare Association

Jessica Hausauer
Executive Director
Minnesota Network of Hospice and Palliative Care

Jarrold Peterson
Vice President and Public Policy Committee Chair
St. Paul Senior Workers Association

Deb Taylor
Chief Executive Officer
Senior Community Services

Jane Pederson
Chief Medical Quality Officer
Stratis Health

Joe Gaugler
Robert L. Kane Endowed Chair in LTC and Aging
University of Minnesota Center on Aging

Kate Grathwol
President and CEO
Vision Loss Resources

Mark Skeie
Executive Director
Vital Aging Network

Julie Manworren
President and CEO
Volunteers of America – Minnesota and Wisconsin